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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 001350

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E AND PM
PARIS LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHER; DOD FOR ISA AFRICA DAS
THERESA WHELAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/21/2014
TAGS: PREL MASS MARR MOPS PTER MCAP FR DJ
SUBJECT: FRANCE'S MILITARY COMMANDER IN DJIBOUTI DESIRES
GREATER REGIONAL FOCUS FOR FRENCH FORCES

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) During the Ambassador's regular weekly meeting October 21 with General Michel Arrault, Commander of French Military Forces in Djibouti, General Arrault related his desire to have his forces become more active in regional security matters. He said the threat of terrorism in this part of the world is certainly a factor in his thinking. The General mentioned a trip undertaken by members of the French armed forces stationed in Djibouti to Massawa, Eritrea during the first week of October. While the General did not elaborate on the activities of his forces during their visit, he said there were difficulties in working with the Eritrean government.

12. (C) Ambassador observed that the unresolved conflict over border issues between Ethiopia and Eritrea may lead to Ethiopian suspicions about French-Eritrean cooperation, given the penchant for conspiratorial thinking among the two states. Arrault agreed but did not comment on whether a similar visit of his forces was planned in the near future for Ethiopia. Meanwhile, post has learned that the 5th Marine Overseas Regiment (Regiment Interarmee d'Outre-Mer) of French Forces stationed in Djibouti is set to conduct training in Ethiopia to prepare Ethiopian forces for peacekeeping duty. We do not have dates for such training. We note, however, that during the meeting with Ambassador, General Arrault queried whether peacekeeping by African Union forces anywhere in the Horn -- specifically in Darfur or in Somalia -- could work without significant physical involvement, and infusion of money, by external powers such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Italy.

13. (C) Comment: Post views General Arrault's expressed desire for greater regional involvement as a significant shift in policy for French Forces Djibouti (FFDJ). Both General Arrault and his predecessor, in prior conversations with us, have been consistently negative toward the possibility of greater FFDJ participation in regional security matters. Instead, they have stressed that France's sole mandate in Djibouti -- unlike our own -- is to uphold the bilateral defense agreement existing between Djibouti and France that guarantees France's defense of Djibouti against external attack. Both he and his predecessor have routinely explained that FFDJ requires the approval of Paris for greater participation in Coalition activities such as those conducted by the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) and the Combined Task Force - 150 (CTF-150). We do not know if this new stance reflects merely General Arrault's desire and action or is at the direction of Paris.
End comment.

RAGSDALE